



**MODULE 4:**  
**EXPLORING**  
**PHILANTHROPY**  
**AS A CULTURAL**  
**TRADITION**

**NO MORE  
EXCUSES**

**EDUCATE EVERY  
STUDENT!**

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**“THE PRACTICE OF SOME FORM OF ORGANIZED PHILANTHROPY IS COMMON TO ALL OF THE GREAT RELIGIONS AND CIVILIZATIONS OF THE WORLD...PEOPLE HAVE USED MANY WORDS AND LABELS FOR THE ACTIVITIES, VALUES, AND THE PURPOSES OF PHILANTHROPY... PEOPLE HAVE JUSTIFIED AND PRACTICED PHILANTHROPY IN MANY WAYS (NOT ALL ADMIRABLE...)”**

— Peyton & Moody



## OBJECTIVES

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- Participants will further understand philanthropy as an institution and a practice.
- Participants will grapple with the connection between philanthropic tradition and the distribution of wealth, power, and privilege over time.

## CONTEXT

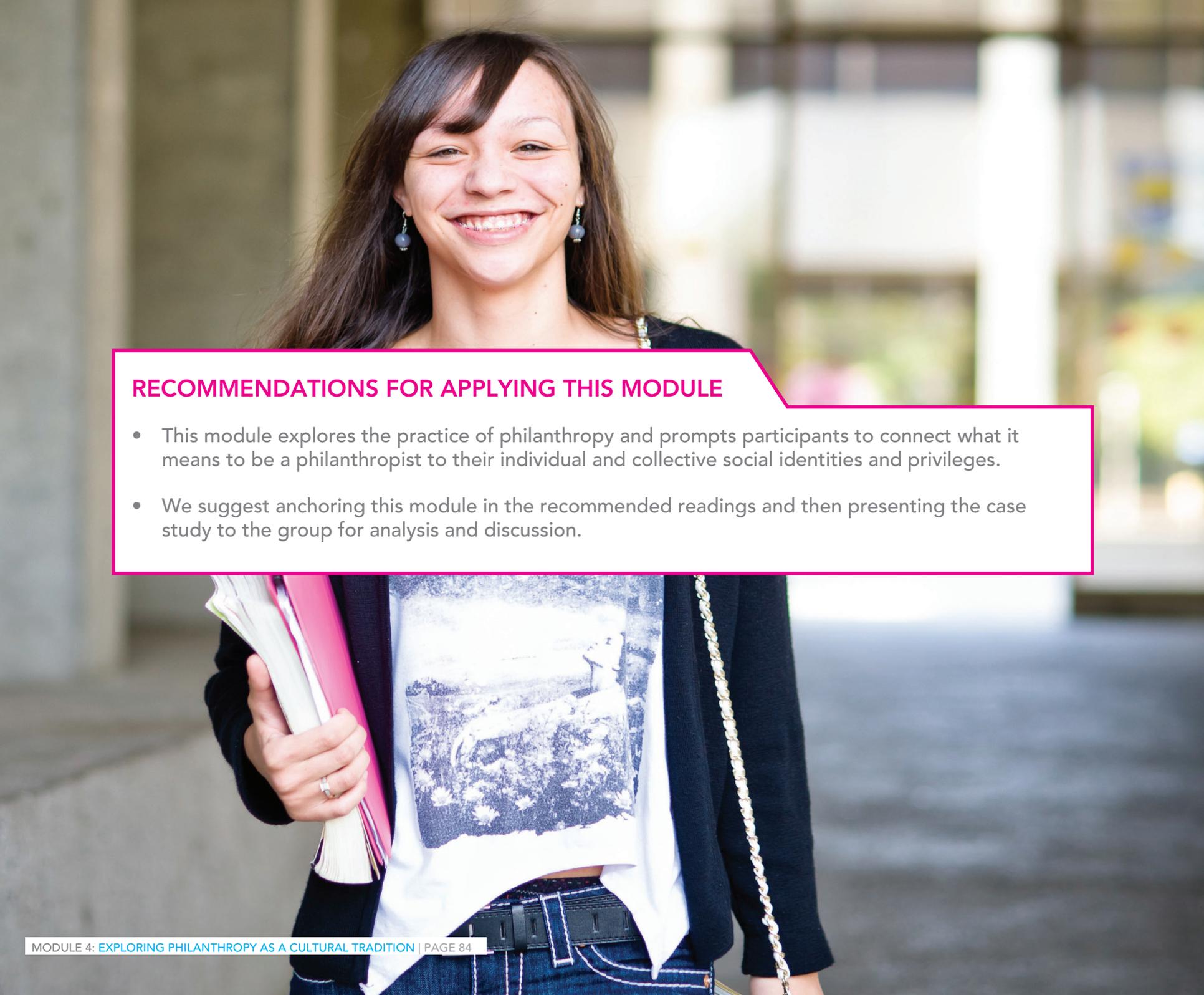
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This module is designed to help participants to see their pursuit of philanthropy in context. Participants will be challenged to consider their philanthropic practice as more than an experience in self-discovery. They will be asked to consider it as a political or cultural statement with real consequences in the world.

## READINGS AND RESOURCES

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- Payton, Robert L. & Moody, Michael P. "Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission." Indiana University Press, 2008. (Excerpts from introduction)
- [http://bit.ly/FoundationCenter\\_Facts](http://bit.ly/FoundationCenter_Facts)
- Read Hall, Peter Dobkin. "Chapter 1 "Historical Perspectives of Non Profit Organizations in the United States" in "The Jossey Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management."
- [http://bit.ly/Historical\\_Perspectives\\_Nonprofits](http://bit.ly/Historical_Perspectives_Nonprofits)



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLYING THIS MODULE

- This module explores the practice of philanthropy and prompts participants to connect what it means to be a philanthropist to their individual and collective social identities and privileges.
- We suggest anchoring this module in the recommended readings and then presenting the case study to the group for analysis and discussion.



# COMMUNITY DISCUSSION: THE PHILANTHROPIC TRADITION

**Introduce a second passage from Peyton & Moody. Based on group dynamics and learning styles, you can opt to have participants re-read it individually or aloud:**

- “The practice of some form of organized philanthropy is common to all of the great religions and civilizations of the world... People have tried numerous things in the name of philanthropy: from saving children to saving trees, from saving refugees to saving old buildings, from saving symphony orchestras to saving stray dogs. People have used many words and labels for the activities, values, and the purposes of philanthropy... People have justified and practiced philanthropy in many ways (not all admirable...)”

**Note for participants that the passage refers to “organized philanthropy” and ask participants to explore how this might differ from the definition we established for ourselves: “voluntary action for the public good.”**

- Check for understanding that organized philanthropy is the sum of voluntary actions for the public good, as they’ve become organized and institutionalized in a “sector” just like the business or government.
- Check for understanding of the major stakeholder groups in the sector and how they relate to one another, including: foundations, which provide financial and human resources to help nonprofits to advance the public good and may (depending on what kind of foundation it is) take direct action to advance the public good themselves; nonprofits, which exist to take direct actions to advance the public good. **As young grantmakers, you can often get the best of both worlds!**

## TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF NONPROFITS, READ “CHAPTER 1 “HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF NON PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES” BY PETER DOBKIN HALL IN “THE JOSSEY BASS HANDBOOK OF NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT.”

[http://bit.ly/Historical\\_Perspectives\\_Nonprofits](http://bit.ly/Historical_Perspectives_Nonprofits)

Ask participants to share their thoughts on how individual acts of philanthropy shape the sector.

- Check for understanding that foundations and nonprofits are created, staffed, and funded — all based on individuals’ decisions to act philanthropically.

Introduce Peyton & Moody’s assertion that philanthropy can also be seen as a cultural tradition, or a “history of the moral imagination.” Underscore the parallel between an individual’s philanthropic autobiography as a reflection of self and the history of the philanthropic sector as a reflection of society. If you completed Module 3, exercise 5, you can weave in questions or references to the Ford Foundation. If you did not, it can be covered here, before moving on to the exercise below.

Ask participants to describe the values that they would expect to see reflected in organized philanthropy in the United States. If participants get stuck, probe with questions like:

- How much money, relatively, would you expect is spent annually?
- What are the causes that would receive the most support?
- Who would you expect to see involved in the sector — entrepreneurs launching nonprofits and foundations, as nonprofit or foundation staff members, as funders?

Take note of participants’ ability to draw linkages with the social justice material that has been covered in the social justice component of the curriculum. Reinforce the connection as needed.

Walk participants through statistics on the philanthropic sector:

[http://bit.ly/FoundationCenter\\_Facts](http://bit.ly/FoundationCenter_Facts)

# SOCIAL JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION





Below you will find a fictional scenario that animates how social justice themes may arise in the daily work of philanthropy. This “case study” is designed to help participants make critical connections between the social justice material and the philanthropy material contained in this module. In advance of a group discussion, you may ask participants to read the case study and reflect on the response questions. Alternatively, you can ask participants to read the scenario aloud and respond to the questions in real-time.

- At the Fictional Foundation, a program team of four staff members has been given a budget of \$500,000 to launch a grant-making program that will address declining high-school graduation rates in a local school district.
- All of the staff members at the Fictional Foundation have academic and professional experience working on education, and one of the team members, “A”, has a PhD in education policy from a large private university in the city where the Foundation is located. “A” suggests that the team do some exploratory work to understand how their grantmaking budget can be used most efficiently to maximize their impact. “A” recommends making a \$100,000 grant to their alma mater, in support of graduate/doctoral student research that will: (1) review graduation rates across district high schools over time, (2) identify schools with increasing high school drop-out rates, and (3) analyze any common traits shared by those under-performing high schools as well as the common traits shared by high school drop-outs themselves. “A” believes that this will help the team identify the barriers to achieving a high school degree. The Fictional Foundation team agrees with “A’s” strategy. They plan to identify a group of nonprofits that can implement solutions based on the research they receive from the university. “A” suspects this will include teacher training and mentoring or 1:1 tutoring for struggling students.



## RESPONSE QUESTIONS

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Facilitate a discussion around the following reflection questions. Ensure that the students acknowledge the distance between the highly educated professionals at Fictional Foundation and the high-school students that they are trying to reach.

1. How do you see privilege showing up in the Fictional Foundation's strategy?
  - Everyone working on this issue is highly educated and not likely from the school district where the Foundation seeks to have an impact.
  - A significant portion of the budget will go to an organization that is not local and is comprised of individuals who are also highly educated and not likely from the community the Fictional Foundation seeks to impact.
2. What problem does the team at the Fictional Foundation seek to address? How might Fictional Foundation's goal relate to some of the social justice issues we have discussed to date?
  - Foundation is working to address the achievement gap, disparities in access to high quality education based on race and class, and institutional oppression that disenfranchises specific communities based on identity.
  - The goal is great, but the approach seeks to reinforce privilege by giving money to students who already have access to excellent education. They are not providing access to those who are systematically denied these kinds of opportunities.

## FACILITATOR'S NOTE

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If participants are reading this independently as an assignment, ask them to reference the Resource Generation reading on “What is Social Justice Philanthropy?” and answer the following question. If you are working through the case study in real time, return to the question below after completing the Community Discussion on Philanthropy (below).

3. Does the Fictional Foundation engage in social justice philanthropy? Why or why not?
  - No
  - Little/no community engagement
  - Strategy does not seek to address root problem
  - As described, little transparency in terms of decision-making about who gets funded
4. If you were on the Fictional Foundation team, what are some ideas that you could present to apply a social justice lens to this project?
  - Cast the net wider — ask what sits behind the declining high school
  - Engage the community in coming up with the strategy and solution set
  - Fund an organization embedded in the community OR fund the large private university
  - Increase transparency around grant-making decisions. Could open an RFP to create a graduation rates research team to train community members on how to do the research themselves so that the grant money/learning opportunity stays local.